

The  
Old Town-House  
of Boston.

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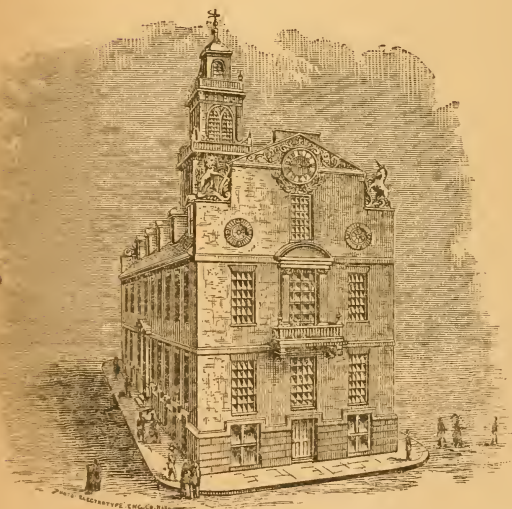
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The  
Old Town-House  
of Boston.



*Here the child Independence was born.—JOHN ADAMS.*

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS:

1883.

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From the infant days of the struggling Puritan settlement, gathered upon the Peninsula of Shawmut, nestling in the low land lying between Beacon, Fort and Copp's Hills, and following the water line of the Town Dock, now covered by the present Quincy Market and streets abut-

ting upon it even farther inland, this site has been one of central interest. Here, upon land now forming the present corner of State and Devonshire streets, the fathers of early Boston consecrated with prayer and psalm their first religious edifice, and it was here, also, that first they held their deliberations upon the conduct of their temporal affairs. As early as 1634, according to an unquestionable authority, a parcel of ground definitely recognized and described in the *Book of Possessions*, under date of eleven years later, was set apart as a market place. This estate, the area of which has never been curtailed or widened, is to-day intact, enclosed within the walls of the Old State House.

To this purpose, then, was devoted "the ground reserved for public uses," until, in 1656, died Captain Robert Keayne, a well known, wealthy and eccentric citizen of that day, who by his will left "the sum of three hundred pounds, current money," which was to be expended for the public interest; or to quote the phraseology of the ancient record: "For building a conduit and a market place, with some convenient room or two for the Courts to meet in, both in summer and winter, and so for the Townsmen and Commissioners in the same building or the like, and a convenient room for a library or a gallery or some other handsome room for the elders to meet in; likewise a room for an armory." Acting in accordance with its provisions, the plans for "the modell of the towne-house to bee built" were referred at a public meeting in 1657 to a committee of citizens, and the result was the erection of the first structure upon the site, which was of wood.

This first Town-house stood from 1658 to 1711, when it was destroyed by fire. Here presided the Royal Governors John Endicott, Richard Bellingham, John Leverett, Simon Bradstreet, Sir Edmund Andros, Sir William Phipps, William Stoughton, Richard, Earl of Bellomont, and Joseph Dudley. The initiatory steps for the erection of its successor were taken by the Selectmen of Boston, upon the 17th of October following, when that body formally petitioned the Legislature upon the subject of its rebuilding. As a result, a joint committee of twelve was appointed by that body, who recommended, according to the record, that "a new house be built in or near where the old Town-house stood, the charge thereof to be borne, the one half by the Province, the other half by the Town of Boston and County of Suffolk in equal proportion." Such was the order for the present building, the dimensions of which were formally prescribed by Legislative enactment to be "not more than one hundred and twelve or less than one hundred and ten feet in length," and it was further specified under date of Nov. 17, 1712, that "the Committee fit the East Chamber for the Use of his Excellency the Governor, and the Honourable the Council." Here, from 1713 to 1747, held gubernatorial sway, Joseph Dudley, *William Tailer*,\* Samuel Shute, *William Dummer*,\* William Burnet, Jonathan Belcher, and William Shirley.

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\* NOTE. — Tailer and Dummer were Lieutenant Governors, filling vacancies until a new Governor should be formally appointed.

Thus were erected, one hundred and seventy years ago, the brick walls of the Old Town-house, which to-day, an interesting and curious fragment of Colonial Boston, looks down upon modern State Street, wherein remains no other relic of the ancient time. The notable fire of Dec. 9, 1747, greatly ravaged its interior, destroying many valuable records and documents deposited for safe keeping in the Council Chamber. The damage to the building, however, was repaired in the course of the following year, and the interior restored substantially as before. Capt. Francis Goelet, in his journal (*See N. E. Hist. Gen. Register, 1870*), thus describes it, as it stood in 1750: "They have also a Towne-House, built of brick, situated in King's (the present State) street. It's a very Grand Brick Building, Arch'd all Round, and Two Storie Heigh, Sashed above; its Lower Part is always open, designed as a Change, thō the Merchants in Fair Weather make their Change in the Open Street, at the easternmost end. In the Upper Story are the Council and Assembly Chambers. It has a neat Capulo, Sashed all Round, which on rejoycing days is Elluminated."

The successful and brilliant administration of Governor Shirley, noted in Provincial annals for the great military expedition, which, under General William Pepperrell, (afterwards baronet) achieved the conquest of Louisbourg, was the first to occupy the restored building. Then came in turn the rule of Thomas Pownall and Francis Bernard, bearing the King's commission; which carries us down to 1760, when the accession of George the Third to the English throne was



proclaimed "with Beat of Drum and Blast of Trumpet from the Balcony under the East Window of the Towne-House." From thence we tread rapidly the path which brings us to the threshold of the Revolution. In 1761 came the famous plea of James Otis, jr., in the Representatives' Hall of this structure, against the Writs of Assistance, followed by numerous manifestations of patriotic sentiment, prominent among which stands forth the record of the meetings called in Faneuil Hall by the colonists, to protest against the passage of the Stamp Act, and the imposition of the tax on tea. In 1768, a misguided ministry determined to over-awe and if possible humiliate the people, by quartering a division of the King's soldiery in Boston an arbitrary and impolitic act, calculated to severely try the loyalty of the Colonists to the Crown.

Persistently closing its ears to the indignant protests against its action, the Royal government, in 1768-69, maintained an attitude of stubborn indifference to the petitions of its colonial subjects. Landing its regulars at Long Wharf, it took measures looking to military occupation, and regiment after regiment wearing England's scarlet, was marched up King street to the encampment upon the Common, until in the winter of 1769-70, there were four thousand troops of the line mustered in the seething town. One regiment was quartered in the lower story of the Town-house, which was flanked by two pieces of ordnance. So prepared the officers of the Crown to uphold King George's sovereignty in restless Boston, little recking the ominous portent of the

storm of popular indignation which was soon destined to burst upon them. In those eventful days, when the narrow streets of the sturdy Puritan town echoed daily to the rattle of arms and the music of fife and drum, were rapidly germinating the seeds of that indomitable spirit of independence, destined soon to stand forth in brilliant relief, against the great back-ground of the Revolution.

Upon the evening of March 5, 1770, at eight o'clock, the peel of the deep toned bell of the First Church rang out upon the frosty air, calling the citizens to King street. Even then might the great crisis at hand have been averted, by temperate official measures. England was still the country which the colonists called their home, and its sovereign, although he had spurned the petitions of America, was yet revered. But it was not to be. A time had arrived in the affairs of New England, which though stormy and troubled, was yet weighted heavily with its future weal. The troops fired upon the people, and the snow in front of the Town-house was crimsoned with American blood.

When the smoke of that fatal volley cleared away, eleven of the sons of New England were seen stretched upon the street. Some, severely wounded, were struggling to rise again; others did not stir, for they were past all pain. Then the spirit of the people seemed about to rise beyond control. The town drums were beaten. The alarm bells rang. An enraged multitude rushed into King street, many of them with arms in their hands. A large force of British infantry was ordered out, in anticipation of attack, and

more bloodshed was avoided only by the appearance of Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson, who hurried to the spot, and from the balcony of the Town-house besought the people to have patience, promising that strict justice should be done, and thus prevailed upon them to disperse.

The arraignment before the Court of the Province, of those of the soldiery engaged in the sad affair, took place in the Town-House in the month of October, 1770; John Adams and Josiah Quincy, jr., appearing for the defence. The decision given was, however, adverse to the anticipations of the colonists. Two of the soldiers were declared guilty of manslaughter, while the rest, with Captain Preston, their commander, were acquitted. "The trials were far from satisfactory to the persecutors," says *Hutchinson*, in his History of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, "and in a short time a great part of the people were induced to believe the acquittals unjust, and contrary to evidence." However this might have been, it is yet plain that the people were by no means discouraged thereby in their resolution to seek justice from the Crown. The memory of the blood wantonly shed in King street was never forgotten nor forgiven. The Boston Massacre passed into history, the smouldering fires of freedom blazed into flame, and the illustrious struggle was initiated, which was ultimately to sunder England forever from her colonies of North America.

Such, briefly reviewed, to the close of the Provincial era, is the story of this honourable and sacred spot, dear to the memories of all who cherish the record of New England's past. Thenceforward,

through the Revolutionary period, it fitly maintained its prominence as the palladium of popular liberties, and the early seat of the representatives of the people. It would be superfluous to recall the many historic events in the annals of the Commonwealth of which it was the witness, or to more than refer to the auspicious occasions, when the great Washington reviewed from its portals the triumphant entry of the Continental army upon the evacuation of Boston by the British; or when, on July 18, 1776, from the East Window of the Council Chamber, the immortal sentences of the august Declaration of Independence were first read to the citizens of the ancient town. Upon the adoption of the State Constitution in 1780, in the Council Chamber was officially inaugurated John Hancock, the first Governor chosen by the people, and the building continued as the seat of Government, under its later title of the Old State House, until 1798, when the State transferred its official residence to the present structure upon Beacon Hill. Subsequently it was occupied from 1830 to 1839, by the City Government, when the City Hall on School street was completed.

The interior finish has been re-produced from the best remaining examples of contemporary work, guided by such indications as were found in the building. It will be noted that the walls of the two great halls, their floors and ceilings, had never been altered, except the interior cross-wall to each. An old plan, which was fortunately recovered, gave the exact line of these walls, and fixed the position of the circular stairway. But the visitor to-day stands in the very room

where Adams, Hancock and Otis spoke, and gazes through the very windows from which Hutchinson and Oliver viewed the patriotic possessions of Boston's citizens.

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The duty of maintaining these halls in suitable condition, and especially of collecting therein all memorials of the past history of the town and city of Boston, has been assumed by the Bostonian Society.

It may be proper to say that the assistance of all of those who are interested in this work is cordially invited by that Society, and that its representatives will gladly furnish information in detail to all inquirers.



The inscription upon the mural tablet, placed at the foot of the staircase, is as follows :



ON THIS SPOT STOOD UNTIL ITS BURNING, OCT. 3, 1711,  
THE FIRST TOWN HOUSE OF BOSTON.

FOUNDED IN 1657 BY THE LIBERALITY OF CAPT. ROBERT KEAYNE.

HERE IN 1713 WAS ERRECTED THE SECOND TOWN HOUSE,  
WHOSE WALLS ENDURED TO THIS DAY, AS DO THE FLOORS  
AND ROOF, CONSTRUCTED IN 1747, AFTER A SECOND FIRE

HAD DEVASTATED ITS CHAMBERS.

HERE THE LOVAL ASSEMBLIES OBEYED THE CROWN;

HERE THE SPIRIT OF LIBERTY WAS AROUSED AND GUIDED  
BY THE ELOQUENT APPEALS AND SAGACIOUS COUNSELS  
OF OTIS, ADAMS, QUINCY, WARREN, CUSHING AND HANCOCK.

HERE THE CHILD INDEPENDENCE WAS BORN;

HERE WASHINGTON RECEIVED THE TRIBUTE OF AN ENFRANCHISED PEOPLE;  
HERE WAS INSTALLED THE GOVERNMENT OF A NEW STATE;  
HERE FOR TEN YEARS OUR CIVIC RULERS ASSEMBLED;

AND HERE

BY THE VOTE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF 1881,  
HAVE BEEN RECONSTRUCTED, IN THEIR ORIGINAL FORM,  
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AND REPRESENTATIVES' HALL—  
HALLOWED BY THE MEMORIES OF THE REVOLUTION.  
MAY OUR CHILDREN PRESERVE THE SACRED TRUST.





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